

## **What are we to make of the concept of wisdom?**

It has **esoteric connotations** – a knowledge that is available to a chosen or elite few and, of course, who would not want to be one of the chosen or the elite? Then, there is the whiff of danger and adventure that surrounds the chosen. One hears of secret societies and initiation rites and campaigns of oppression and subjection. Soon, we are into Dan Brown territory and the realm of fantasy.

Has any of this anything to do with real wisdom – the wisdom that we read of in the sacred scriptures and that we associate with holiness and wholeness, insight into what is essential in life and what is true to the nature of every human being?

The quotation from scripture that is perhaps the most well known is: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** The fear of the Lord? Surely, wisdom is not about fear? I remember reading what one of the great scripture scholars had to say about the, “fear of the Lord”. He suggested that this **“fear”** oscillates between wonder and awe. The origins of the word awe are to be found in the concept of terror, something that is awful rather than awesome. This is the fear that we are talking about. It is a recognition that we are in relationship with nothing less than Being itself and that we are, in a sense, insignificant in comparison with this Being. However, as we shall see in the course of these few days, that really is only part of the story.

So, what about the word, **“wonder”**? Tad Dunne suggests that wonder is the origin of all prayer. So, when a child, or adult for that matter, gazes in wonder, they are acknowledging what is other than themselves and what amazes them in its otherness. This acknowledgment is also a entering into a relationship with the object of wonder. I see a butterfly and its colour, its delicacy, its fragility, its flight and its very existence causes me to wonder. My being touches it’s being, however momentarily, and I am in relationship with the other. In some way also, I am in relationship with all being and with Being itself. This is wonder.

If, therefore, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, wisdom has something to do with exploring within my own being, my relationship with myself with all other being and with Being itself, often referred to as God. This is such a huge prospect that immediately I can recognize that it is not something that I can demand, or expect. It is gift.

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April 2011***